Castlemaine Naturalist

July 2015

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Fomitopsis lilacinogilva - Lilac Shelf Fungus at Bullarto Reservoir - photo Noel Young

New Zealand - February 2015

Joy Weatherill

In February, I spent three weeks touring and walking in New Zealand, and my outstanding impression is of a country which is pristine and beautiful; but at the same time, fragile - formed by earth's movements and carved out by glaciers.

We worked our way south from Auckland, seeing boiling mud and erupting geysers around Rotorua; and the steaming crater of Mt Tongariro in the Tongariro National Park, (Walkers were required to sign a form and state next of kin!) The leader who had walked the Tongariro Crossing about a month before noted that there was more steam coming from the crater than previously.

And finally to Christchurch. I couldn't believe that four years after their earthquake, there would still be such a scene of destruction - vacant areas where buildings had once stood, other buildings boarded up, and the bitumen road rather undulating.

The weather was very kind to us. I had not expected to see snow on the higher mountain peaks of the North island. As we travelled from one place to the next, it seemed to be nearly always beside long mountain ranges and beautiful lakes. Some birds I saw - like the Weka, the Kea and the Takahe (once thought to be extinct and looking like a Purple Swamp-hen on steroids) were new to me; and others like the Shellduck, Silvereye, Bellbird and Heron were similar but different to ours - eg. the silver eye of the Silvereye was much more pronounced, and the Bellbird sang with a completely different song to ours.

Vegetation on the South Island was very lush - on the Kepler and Routeburn tracks - lots ot mosses and fungi, and trees dripping with lichens. Also beautiful flowers like gentian and bluebells (both becoming whiter the higher the altitude - they are fertilised by moths rather than butterflies so need to be seen at night).

Climbing to the peak of Key Summit on the Routeburn Track, we were rewarded with wonderful views down the Eglinton and Greenstone valleys, and at the top where it flattened out - a little tarn formed in a depression carved out by a former glacier.

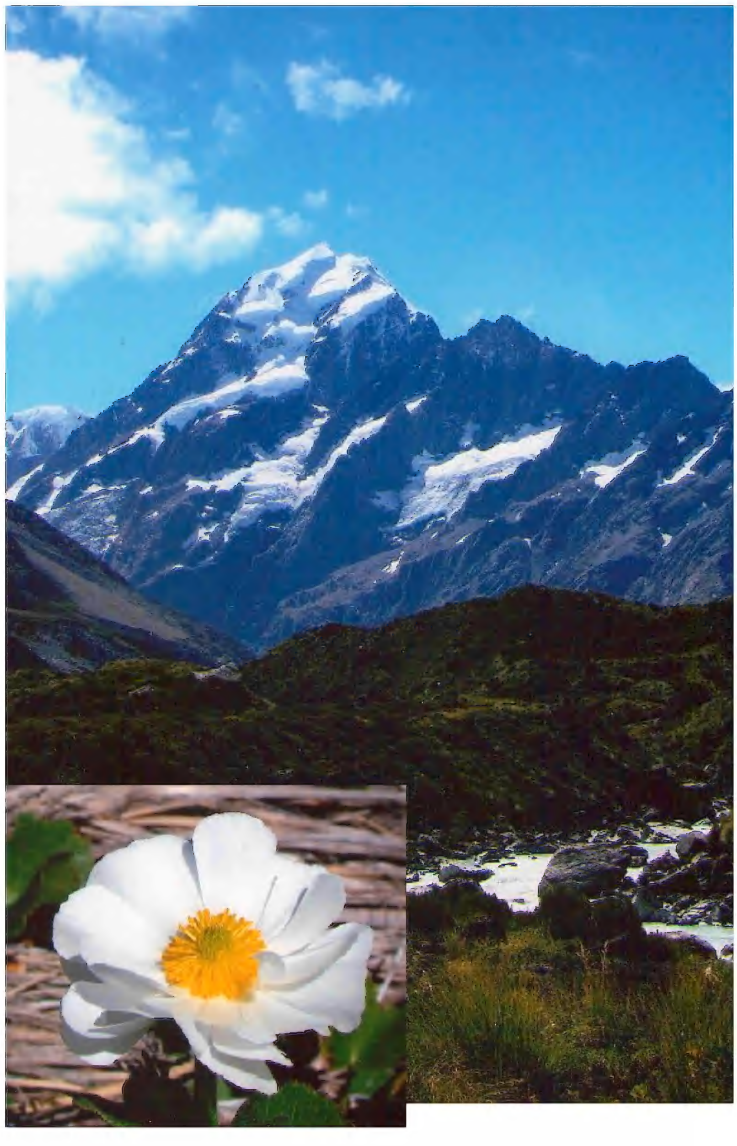
The walk into the base of Franz Josef Glacier revealed heaps of rocks - moraine - pushed to the side by the force of the glacier, waterfalls and alpine flowers.

In 1966 it was estimated that there were 370 glaciers in New Zealand. A more thorough count in the 1980's listed over 3,000 glaciers larger than a hectare. In the North island, only volcanic Mt.Ruapehu (2797 metres) has glaciers - (18).

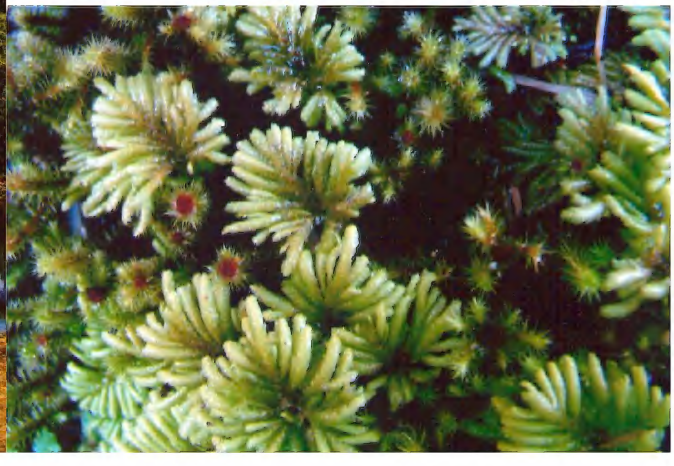
Most of New Zealand's largest glaciers are in the Southern Alps which have the highest precipitation. Glaciers in the Aoraki/Mt. Cook area include the 29 kilometre long Tasman, the Murchison (18 k.) the Mueller, Hooker and Godley east of the main divide and the Fox (13k.) and Franz Josef (12k.) west of the divide.

The Tasman is by far the largest and longest glacier - up to 699 metres thick and 29 kilometres long. Icebergs break off into the lake at the floor of Tasman's terminal.

As we walked in to the foot of Mt. Cook on the Hooker Valley track, the clouds cleared, and Mount Cook lived up to its name - Aoraki - the cloud piercer. [right]



Inset: Mt. Cook buttercup.



Key Summit on the Routeburn track:

Above left, Mt. Christina reflected in a tarn; above right, Gentian flowers and moss.

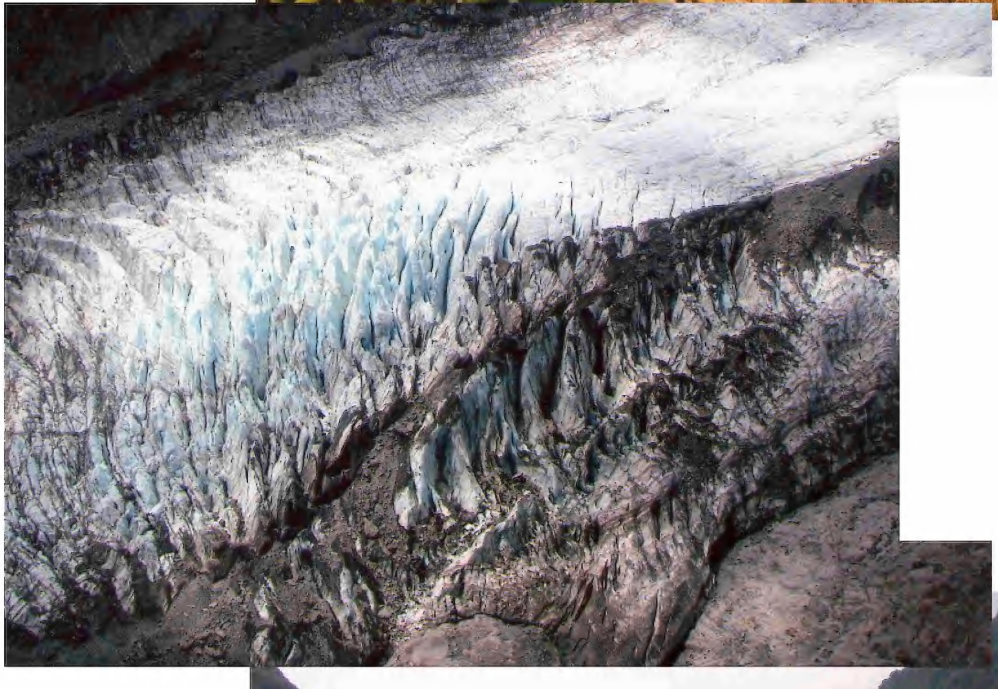
New Zealand Birds

Weka at Milford Sound

Sooty Oystercatcher at Punakaiki beach,

Silvereye near Christchurch

Paradise Shelduck (Putakitaki) - Queen Charlotte Sound



Maria Island Tasmania

Richard Piesse

Declared a National Park in the late 1960's, Maria Is. has had an interesting history as a penal settlement (before Port Arthur), a later probation station in the 1840's, various periods of agricultural pursuits and an industrial period (cement works) in the 1920's - all of this since the first white man made contact with aborigines in 1689!

The island is divided into two sections joined by a sandy isthmus. The northern includes Mt. Maria which rises to 709m and has areas of tall forest.

The geology of the island is quite representative of Tasmania in general, with Dolerite a feature of the higher peaks.

The flora and fauna is very varied with many plants and birds that are endemic to SE Tasmania (included are the Green Rosella, Tasmanian Scrubwren, and Forty-spotted Pardalote).

The island is a wonderful place to visit as a naturalist. Overnight visitors must take any necessary provisions as there are no "retail shops" on the island.

A Visit to the Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve

Chris Timewell

In the 1940s, the three daughters of Mary Cairncross donated 100 acres of land to the Landsborough Council. A Deed of Trust over the land aimed to preserve this patch of rainforest which their mother loved so much. Small additions have been made to the reserve extent in subsequent years. Thankfully, the intention of the original reservation has been honoured, and at a mere 55 hectares, it is one of the last and largest remaining patches of subtropical rainforest in the hinterland of south-east Queensland (http://www.mary-cairncross.com.au/index.php). It seems to be surrounded mostly by farmland and lifestyle properties.

On the afternoon of 22 June 2015, Lisa and I spent a very enjoyable 2-3 hours quietly walking through this special place. (The sign at the start of the walk suggests most people would take not much more than 30 minutes!). Strangler trees, Red Cedars and a range of other unfamiliar plants grew in lush and entangled profusion.

It was exciting to see our first Yellow-throated Scrub-wrens, but by the fiftieth time we were less enthusiastic! Other interesting species seen were the Brown Cuckoo-dove, the Large-billed Scrubwren, Lewin's Honeyeater, the Red-legged

Pademelon and a colony of Little Red Flying-foxes. We also heard the distinctive 'wompoo' call of the Wompoo Fruit Dove and the crack of the Eastern Whipbird. There were a range of others we missed out on seeing this time (such as the Paradise Riflebird, Marbled Frogmouth, Green Catbird), but all the more reason to visit again if we have the chance.

The nearby town of Maleny was also worth visiting, with lots of bookshops, organic foodstores and eco-cafes.

Editor's bit

If this months articles are anything to go by, it appears to be the time for holidays away, or at least for reporting on them. Nothing like experiencing a totally different environment to give you a fresh perspective. Most of us were there for the June meeting however, as the room was packed with both members and many visitors to hear Lynne Kelly's fascinating ideas on preliterate societies and their methods of memorising a vast amount of detail about the natural world they would depend on.

Next day only a few of us ventured out to Bullarto reservoir to search for fungi in a leach-infested gully. Not highly productive, but we found a few, mostly agaric types. The most interesting find is shown on the cover. Better luck next time! Photo - Claire Morgan

I have a number of **local maps** which I would like to give away to a good home,both 1:100,000 and 1:25,000. I could be contacted on 54723142 Penny Garnett

Observations

- It seems The Birds are again ganging up on Helen and Kit who now have an invasion of Choughs in the garden enticed by the pea straw
- Natalie reported Greenhood orchids on her property again, including Pterostylis plumosa (Bearded Greenhood)
- Denis has had visits from Spinebills, a pair of Scrub Robins, and Pied Currawongs. He has seen more Black Wallabies than ever before, including a female with large young in pouch
- June 25 mid-day, flock of about 50 Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos flying over Happy Valley - Noel Young

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists
Coming events

Fri July 10 meeting: Speaker JOHN LINDNER: Walking in the Flinders Ranges and understanding the Natural History

Sat July 11 field trip: To the Pipeline Track - leader Geraldine Harris

Sat 1, Sun 2 August: Swift Parrot & Regent Honeyeater survey

Fri August 14 meeting: Speaker ROD ORR: Orchids

Fri Sept. 11 meeting: Speaker JASON EDWARDS: Wildlife photography

Fri October 9 meeting: Speaker ANDREW SKEOCH: Soundscapes

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Subscriptions for 2015
Ordinary membership: Single $30, Family $40
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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